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Letter from Taizé
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THE LISBON MEETING

# The Urgency of Peace

"If at present we are undertaking a pilgrimage of trust on earth with young people from every continent, that is because we are aware of how urgent peace is. We can contribute to peace to the extent that we try and reply to the following questions by the life we live: Can I become a bearer of trust where I live? Am I ready to understand others better and better?" This is how Brother Roger spoke on December 28th to the 40,000 young adults together for the 27th annual meeting.

## "I rediscovered my parish through the meeting"

*Some 10,000 families from the Lisbon area opened their doors to welcome the participants. In all the parishes of the region, young people were active in spreading the news of the meeting and inviting people to offer hospitality. Marta, a young woman from the parish of Alcanhoes, wrote:*

I was part of a preparation team that began to meet already in April 2004. When we heard that the meeting was going to be held in Portugal, we asked the brothers if we could offer hospitality, since our parish is not far from Lisbon. The response was positive, so we began immediately. We were not many at first, but gradually the group became larger. Most of us were between 16 and 20 years old. Little by little we started meeting every weekend. We looked for ways of convincing families to welcome participants; we invited other young people to join us; we prepared the different parts of the meeting; we organized the transportation from the train station to the parish. To manage this last element, at the end of Sunday mass we offered tea and cakes prepared by families. In return, people contributed to the costs of hiring a bus. Saturday afternoons we would go by twos to knock on doors to tell people about the event. For us, the meeting had already begun! We got to know the people of the parish and their problems. We discovered how essential it is to spend time with people who live alone or those who need to be listened to.

Before the meeting we used to meet once a month to pray. During the preparation, we began to pray each week. The prayer nourished us, gave meaning to the work we had to do, helped us deal with our doubts and brought us strength in our weaknesses.

Finally December 28th arrived, and with it the 120 young people we were welcoming. That day and the following ones were a thunderclap for us! I was very tired; the problems that arose seemed impossible to solve. And yet the people who bombarded me with questions were always very nice and never resented it when things did not work out as planned. For example,

once the train was an hour and a half late. Instead of getting angry, the families waiting at the station built a fire and had a small party.

It was only after the meeting, when we met with the families, that I realized we had come to the next step. At that moment, I was gripped by a strong nostalgia: am I experiencing the same thing that people experience when they go to Taizé? They weep because the week is over, as if all the rest were nothing...

## A life in harmony with God's steps

So I had to find a meaning in all that. And now I see the meeting as something that shed light on what we discovered during the preparation.

Taizé helped me to see my life in a different way. When we experience God's love, everything changes. Sometimes I need to intensify the times of prayer so that my life can be in harmony with God's steps. This meeting brought me something new. I feel that it is possible to change the life in Alcanhoes. Now I know those few small things that make people happy. And it is up to me to do them.

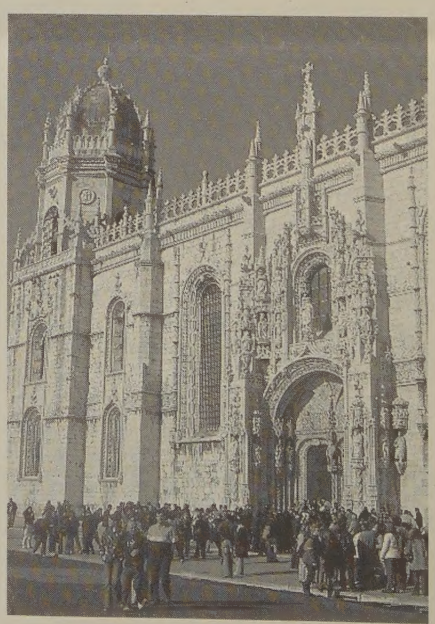
*Two weeks after the meeting, the families that had welcomed the participants in that parish met to share their experiences. A woman said that through the meeting she realized it was possible to welcome young people she did not know as if they were her own children. In front of everybody, she committed herself to take orphans into her home during their school holidays. Another woman, quoting the Letter to the Hebrews (13:2), said that "we welcomed angels without realizing it." With smiles of joy and tears of emotion, everyone began to applaud.*

## "They shared with us the best they had"

*Wojtek, a Polish boy, spent several months in Lisbon to help prepare the meeting. He tells of his visits in the slum of Quinta da Serra:*

Quinta da Serra is a poor part of Prior Velho, a parish in the suburbs of Lisbon. Already the first time I went there, the place impressed me very much. Just next to an ordinary area of blocks of flats I could see a whole district of shacks and small makeshift houses occupied by African immigrants. Some of them were completely in ruins. On the roofs of others you could find all kinds of useless objects, like old tires or broken chairs and toys. I was told that in each of these dwellings a few families might live together, sometimes up to 30 persons.

During our first visit we met many people. Usually the elder ones were just sitting outside, so we greeted each one of them by saying: *"Olá"*, *"Bom dia"*, *"Tudo bem?"*. They knew the person with us well, because she has helped in the district for years. Some of the women were cooking; next to a narrow path I saw a lady washing a little girl's hair; in another place there was a man repairing a big hole in his roof. From far away you could hear loud, rhythmic music and see a group of young people with big and dangerous-looking dogs. Someone told me that organised dog-fights were nothing unusual there.



## How can we welcome others when the living conditions are so difficult?

All at once I saw, behind a grating, a big colorful poster on the front wall of one of the buildings. The poster was inviting to the Taizé European Meeting and I could read, written in capitals, the word "TRUST". Yes, Prior Velho was one of the parishes which was going to welcome young people during the meeting in Lisbon. But how to welcome others to Quinta da Serra, when the people there themselves live in such difficult conditions?

The pilgrimage of trust started there with regular prayers. Every week young people from Quinta da Serra and from the other part of the parish, together with their priests and the Little Sisters of Jesus who live there, used to prepare a prayer around the cross. Already at the entrance to the district, a group of children was waiting for all those who were coming from outside for the prayer. They led us through dark paths to a house in the centre of Quinta, where in a big room everything was already prepared in a very simple and beautiful way. Very quickly the whole place was filled, mostly with children but also with young and older people from the neighbourhood. After the prayer around the cross, our hosts invited us for a simple and very joyful feast. They shared with us the best they had. Someone prepared a cake; others were offering tea.

We could see that many of them had a great desire to welcome the others to their own place in spite of the difficult conditions. The community of Quinta da Serra decided to use the building of the neighbourhood association as a dormitory. The young people had worked very hard for several weeks to prepare this place for the welcome. During the meeting, many of them accompanied their twelve young guests from France and Poland who were staying there. Some slept with them in the same building, and each

day a different family prepared breakfast and supper.

One day after the meeting I went there for the last time. On that day I realized how beautiful Quinta da Serra is because of the beauty and simplicity of the people who live there. I received so much from them and I am sure that something will continue there.

A WORKSHOP IN LISBON

# Opening Our Eyes to Distress

Opening our eyes to distress and discovering hope: involvement with the homeless.

The *Vida e Paz* ("Life and Peace") community began in Lisbon twenty years ago, when a small group of Christians became aware of how precarious life was for people who live on the street, those usually called the "homeless".

As the years passed, this small group managed to coordinate the assistance of hundreds of volunteers to persons with no fixed dwelling. From simply being present at night on the street, to distributing food and clothing, to psychological and medical assistance, all the way to, for some, a program of reinsertion extended over several years, the community tries to remain alongside those persons who are most alienated from society.

Elena, Liliana and Henrique are volunteers with that community. They explained their involvement to several hundred participants in the European meeting during a workshop held on December 29th, 2004. It was held at the Church of the Angels, located at the heart of a district known for prostitution near the center of Lisbon, a "living area" for many street people.

This church is an important stop on the route of one of the two minibuses which visit those on the street each night. Liliana, a young administrative assistant in a clinic, is part of one of these night teams every other weekend. "We distribute food and clothing to homeless persons," she explained. "But that is not the most important part of the work. We try most of all to make contact with people and to keep this contact up over time. Sometimes you need to talk with the homeless a long time for them to realize that living on the street is not the answer to their problems or their aspirations."

> "There are young people all over the world who are inventive and creative"

Henrique works in the stage before Liliana. He is an engineering student and organizes the food collection together with the scouts of his parish, São João de Talha. In the neighborhood of the parish there are many cafés. Almost every week he visits the managers before the weekly closing to ask for the stock of unsold goods. Henrique and his group are part of the 315 volunteers who help the association. The *Vida e Paz* community also includes some paid workers, often ex-homeless persons or those who were slipping, like Carlos, also present at the workshop, who explained that the community gave him a job just at the right time. But the organization of the night teams is largely made up of volunteers.

Then Carlos showed some photos of what follows this work on the street. The *Vida e Paz* community runs four rehabilitation centers where homeless people can receive medical and psychological assistance to help them work out a way to return to society. The program normally lasts 13 months. One centre is particularly devoted to drug addicts, another more oriented towards job formation. In addition to these centers there are two therapeutic apartments where people less affected by their time on the street can learn to live together again and get ready to enter the working world. To help them, a business venture, > 7

EUCHARIST

## What did Jesus want to express by leaving us the Eucharist?

The heart of the Christian message is the proclamation of communion, a life shared with God that results in solidarity among human beings, all sons and daughters of the same Father. In his life on earth as one of us, Jesus did not only invite human beings to open themselves to this message; he lived it out in his own existence: "I have come from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of the One who sent me. And the will of the One who sent me is that I lose nothing of all he has given me, but raise it up on the last day" (John 6:38-39). If Jesus' entire existence manifests a life for God and for others, it is above all the end of his life on earth, his death on the cross, that witnesses fully to his gift of self to the very end. Transfigured by the power of the Spirit at work in the resurrection, this existence as gift became the foundation of a life of communion for all.

On the night before he died, Jesus expressed the meaning of his life and his death in the language of gesture. During a festive meal he took some bread and blessed it while adding the words: "This is my body, given for you." Then at the end of the meal, he blessed a cup of wine while saying: "This is my blood, shed for you." The disciples took what Jesus handed to them and consumed it.

This act of Jesus makes the burning core of our faith present with unimaginable density. In the Bible, eating food with someone is a way of expressing a shared life. Guests seated around the same table form a virtual family; they recognize one another as brothers and sisters. But here, what creates the unity among the guests is Jesus himself. Not only does he invite to his table and preside at the meal, but he gives himself as the food that communicates the same Life to all. "My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them." (John 6:55-56.)

By giving his life for us, Jesus thus offers us the possibility of entering into fellowship with him and therefore with one another. If, in human terms, food and drink are assimilated by those who eat and drink, by sharing in the body and blood of Christ he assimilates us to himself: we become what we consume, the Body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:17), the prolongation of Christ's active presence in the world. The Eucharist manifests in sacramental fashion the deepest meaning of Christ's death and resurrection, communicating that Life which consists in communion with the Source of all life and which turns us into one family, one body.

## Is the Eucharist more than the repetition of something that happened long ago?

Jesus said to his disciples together for the last supper, "Do this as my memorial" (Luke 22:19). Following his suggestion, for two thousand years Christians have continued to recall, in their liturgy, Jesus' gift of his life. The celebration of the Eucharist looks back to the past and keeps it alive as a wellspring in the ongoing life of the Christian community.

But in this celebration we do far more than merely recall something that happened long ago. The word "memorial," in Hebrew *zikkaron*, does not refer to an act of human memory to keep an event of the past from passing into oblivion. Rather, it expresses the fact that, in the nation's worship, it is God who keeps alive in the present day his past "marvels," in other words his powerful acts of mercy and salvation. Each time Israel celebrates the feast of Passover, for example, the event of the liberation from Egypt becomes a reality today: the liberator God is still present and active in the midst of his faithful people.

All the more so, since Jesus is risen from the dead and thus alive for ever, can it be said that his presence never deserts the community of his disciples. He is present as the Crucified One who is simultaneously the Risen Lord, a reality marvelously expressed in the Book of Revelation by the image of a Lamb, slain yet standing in the middle of God's throne (see Revelation 5:6). This presence comes to a climax in the Eucharist, where believers enter into communion with Christ in his passover from death to life.

And since the Easter mystery leads to the gift of the Spirit "without reserve" (see John 3:34), the Eucharist is likewise the presence of the risen Christ who brings us together today around his table in order to send us out as his witnesses on the roads of the world. In the Acts of the Apostles, the life of the first Christians has two aspects which express the beating of its heart: sometimes they are called together into unity and sometimes they are sent out in their turn towards others, to express and to invite to a wider communion. The celebration of the Eucharist includes these two dimensions of call and sending, of gathering and of mission.

Finally, the Eucharist is a foretaste of the great heavenly banquet where all nations will form a single family in God (see Isaiah 25:6-9). During his last supper, did not Jesus say, "Never again will I eat [this Passover] until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16)? By representing this absolute future, the liturgy, "memory of the future," exists to give us a foretaste here on earth of God's joy. Thus the celebration of the Eucharist unites past, present and future in an act of disarming simplicity that nourishes our pilgrimage in the steps of Christ, like the manna from heaven for the people of Israel in the wilderness long ago (see John 6:30ff).

# MAY

## DAILY READINGS

Jn 14:15-26
**1 SUN** Before his Passion, Jesus said to his disciples: I shall ask the Father and he will give you another protector, the Holy Spirit, to be with you for ever.

2 S 22:17-20
**2 Mon** The Lord rescued me from enemies who were stronger than I am and set me in the open.

Lk 19:1-10
**3 Tue** Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus as he passed. Jesus said to him: "Come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today." And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.

Ep 2:13-22
**4 Wed** In Christ, you are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit.

Mt 28:16-20
**5 Thu** ASCENSION Jesus, risen from the dead, said to his disciples: I am with you always, to the end of time.

Jn 6:37-40
**6 Fri** Jesus said: The will of the one who sent me is that I should lose none of those he has given me, but that I should raise them up on the last day.

Dt 6:4-9
**7 Sat** Moses said to the people: The Lord our God is the only God. Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.

Jn 17:6-11
**8 SUN** Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: I am no longer in the world; they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

Ps 72
**9 Mon** In God's days justice will flourish, and peace in plenty until the end of time. For the Lord rescues the needy who call to him and the poor who have no one to help.

Jn 15:1-5
**10 Tue** Jesus said: Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Rm 6:12-14
**11 Wed** Give yourselves to God and then sin will no longer have any power over you — you are not under law, but under grace.

Mk 12:41-44
**12 Thu** Jesus saw a poor widow put two small coins into the temple treasury and, calling his disciples, he said, "In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others, for they all gave out of their wealth, but she has put in everything she possessed."

Jn 15:9-17
**13 Fri** Jesus said: There is no greater love than to give one's life for those one loves.

Rm 14:13-19
**14 Sat** St. Paul writes: The kingdom of God is not a question of exterior rules, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Jn 20:19-23
**15 SUN** PENTECOST The Risen Christ said to the disciples: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Ga 5:16-18,22-23
**16 Mon** Let yourselves be guided by the Spirit and you will not be under the Law. For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, trust in others and self-control.

Si 2:1-11
**17 Tue** You who revere the Lord, trust in him, await his good gifts: everlasting joy and mercy.

Is 45:1-7
**18 Wed** God says: I will go before you and will level the mountains so that you may know that I am the Lord, the one who calls you by name.

Jn 15:15-17
**19 Thu** Jesus said to his disciples: I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends, because everything I have learnt from my Father I have made known to you.

Dt 15:7-11
**20 Fri** Be open-handed towards your neighbour and towards the poor and needy in your land.

Ep 2:13-18
**21 Sat** Christ is our peace. He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between the peoples and reconciled them to God, through the cross.

Jn 3:14-21
**22 SUN** God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

Ac 10:1-35
**23 Mon** Peter said: I now really understand that God has no favourites, but that in every nation he loves those who revere him and act justly.

1 Jn 5:14-15
**24 Tue** John writes: We are confident that if we ask God for anything, and it is in accordance with his will, he will hear us.

Jr 31:31-34
**25 Wed** The Lord says: I shall put my Law deep within them, I shall write it on their hearts. I shall be their God and they will be my people.

1 Co 10:16-17
**26 Thu** Is not the bread which we break communion in the body of Christ? Because there is only one bread, we, who are many, are one body.

1 Jn 1:5-7
**27 Fri** If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we are in communion with one another.

Ps 119:1-16
**28 Sat** With all my heart I seek you, O God. I treasure your promises in my heart so as not to sin against you.

Jn 6:51-58
**29 SUN** Jesus said: Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

1 Tm 4:12-16
**30 Mon** Paul writes to Timothy: You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you. Do not neglect it.

Col 3:12-17
**31 Tue** Paul writes: May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one Body.

Christ Jesus,
through your Gospel
we understand that
mercy is what
matters most. So
give us hearts
overflowing with
kindness.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Holy Spirit,
in your presence we
discover that we are
never alone, and
you nurture in us a
continual
communion with
you.

1 Jn 1:1-7
**1 Wed** This is what we have heard from Christ: God is light, in him there is no darkness at all.

Ep 4:25-32
**2 Thu** Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

2 Co 1:3-7
**3 Fri** Blessed be God who consoles us in all our afflictions. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

Mk 4:35-41
**4 Sat** When Jesus had calmed the storm on the sea, the disciples were overcome with awe and said: Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him.

Mt 9:10-13
**5 SUN** Jesus said: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Indeed, I have come not to call the just, but sinners.

Ph 1:1-11
**6 Mon** Paul writes: I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best.

Mk 1:29-39
**7 Tue** Very early, long before dawn, Jesus got up and went to a deserted place and there he prayed. When the disciples found him, he said to them, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also."

Is 29:15-21
**8 Wed** When the Lord comes, the deaf will hear the words of the book and, delivered from shadows and darkness, the eyes of the blind will see. The poor and resourceless will find fresh joy in God.

Rv 22:16-21
**9 Thu** Jesus is the bright morning star. Let all who are thirsty come; let whoever wishes take the water of life as a gift.

2 Co 4:8-12
**10 Fri** Paul writes: We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; we see no way out, but we never despair. We always carry in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed there too.

Ws 1:1-15
**11 Sat** The Spirit of the Lord fills the world: it holds all things together and knows every word said.

Mt 9:36—10:8
**12 SUN** Jesus said to his disciples: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.

Ps 16
**13 Mon** Lord, you teach me the way of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy.

2 Co 12:1-10
**14 Tue** Paul writes: God said to me: My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

2 Co 1:18-22
**15 Wed** Paul writes: Christ Jesus was never Yes-and-No; his nature is all Yes.

Is 61:1-4
**16 Thu** The Lord sent me to comfort all who mourn, to clothe them in festive garments instead of despondency.

1 Co 2:1-9
**17 Fri** Paul writes: I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you God's mystery, for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Ac 26:1-23
**18 Sat** The Risen Christ said to Paul: I am sending you out so that people may turn from darkness to light and receive, through faith in me, forgiveness of their sins.

Mt 10:26-33
**19 SUN** Jesus said: Not a single sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing. And even the very hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid.

Mk 6:30-34
**20 Mon** When Jesus saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them at length.

Ezk 20:40-44
**21 Tue** God says to his people: I shall gather you from all the nations where you have been scattered. Through you, I shall display my holiness for all nations to see.

Mt 20:20-28
**22 Wed** Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world the powerful make their power felt. Among you this is not to happen. No, anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant.

Jn 6:1-15
**23 Thu** After the people saw Jesus feed the crowd, they began to say: "Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, realizing that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew to the hills again, alone.

Is 49:1-6
**24 Fri** St JOHN THE BAPTIST The Lord says: It is not enough for you to be my servant. I shall make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach the furthest corners of the earth.

1 P 5:5-7
**25 Sat** Clothe yourselves in humility in your relationships with others, for God gives his grace to the humble.

Mt 10:37-42
**26 SUN** Jesus said: If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, they will certainly not lose their reward.

2 P 1:19-21
**27 Mon** You do well to pay attention to the word of the prophets, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Mt 12:15-21
**28 Tue** In Jesus the words of the prophet Isaiah were fulfilled: "Look! My servant whom I have chosen. I will place my Spirit upon him. In him the nations will put their hope."

2 Tm 4:6-18
**29 Wed** SS PETER AND PAUL Paul writes: I have fought the good fight to the end. I have run the race to the finish. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord will give me.

Ps 5
**30 Thu** Thanks to your faithful love I may enter your house, where I bow down in adoration. Lead me, O Lord, in your justice.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

# DAILY READINGS JUNE

# BIBLE MEDITATIONS

## May: Nehemiah 9:16-19

These few lines from the Book of Nehemiah sum up Bible history in a striking fashion, with an astounding revelation as the key: even when misunderstood, unloved and rejected, the God of the Bible continues to love each person to the very end; God never abandons anyone, no matter what happens. This revelation is all the harder for human beings to accept since, when they are unable to reconcile themselves to certain facets of their personality and their past, they often find it hard to feel that they are worthy of being loved. Sometimes, they even imagine God as someone who is eager to judge and to condemn them.

Nehemiah invites us to distance ourselves from this harsh way of looking at ourselves that we often project onto God. His words are a call to discover a God who does not view us along the lines of the judgments and fears that are found to a greater or lesser degree in every human psyche, a God who overflows with the liberating kindness so remarkably expressed by Saint John: "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows everything" (1 John 3:20). And in fact, how could the One who created human beings not understand his creatures better than anyone, falling into the trap of outward appearances and not perceiving behind this or that negative attitude the reaction of a heart that suffers from not feeling sufficiently understood, recognized and loved?

Letting ourselves be loved more and more by the God who only wants to heal the secret wounds linked to a distant or recent past means entering into a reciprocal love, one that we will constantly find to be far more beautiful than anything a human heart could ever dare hope for.

- How does the manner in which Nehemiah describes God's activity help me to see God's love in a brand-new way?
- How can the discovery of this divine goodness allow me to be more at peace with myself; how can it help me to understand my own heart better?
- To what extent would the life of those close to me become more beautiful if I saw them as God sees them?

## June: Luke 14:12-14

Using the example of the people we invite to the parties we organize, Jesus reminds us that the overflowing life of God's Kingdom goes far beyond anything we can imagine and accomplish, even were we to manage our life, our resources and our relationships in the most prudent and judicious way possible.

God gives, with no strategy or keeping of accounts. He aspires to awaken in human beings someone like himself who enters into fellowship with him. The primary motivation in God's Kingdom is the joy of unconditional giving. We are invited to take the same risk.

Those who want to take part in God's Reign can leave behind the habitual tendency to calculate what will be most profitable to them or to create a network of people obligated to them. Loved by God, they are not the only judge of the worth of their life, nor the only one responsible for their happiness.

The poor, the lowly, those who "cannot pay you back," become the privileged road chosen by God to open his Kingdom to us. By putting them in the place of honor, we will discover and confirm the freedom and the joy of giving.

To suppose, in God's name, that other people, even those from whom I can expect nothing in return, are my joy, will extricate me from timidity, fear and contempt, and allow me to discover my inalienable joy. Such an outlook attests my specific human dignity and brings me to life beyond all expectations.

We are not invited to wait passively, as spectators, for the Kingdom to arrive. Living in the Spirit of Christ, we are called to take part in its coming by making ourselves servants and neighbors even of those who do not love us.

- In my life, who are those who "cannot pay me back"?
- In what circumstances have I discovered the joy and the freedom of giving unconditionally?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

3 Covipaz, also started by *Vida e Paz*, employs nine of them for a period of time not more than two years, to help them fly with their own wings.

"We are not superheroes," explains Elena. "I began this volunteer work when I realized that, from the time my two children began to get big, I was spending my free time munching on snacks in front of the television! It is not easy to begin this kind of work." And yet, despite the feeling of not getting anywhere and of having to begin over and over again with some, Elena, Liliana and Henrique all speak of discovering true joy. Beyond all the inevitable disappointments there is the conviction that there is more happiness in giving than in receiving. On this first day of the European meeting in Lisbon, they appeared to be living examples of what Brother Roger described at the beginning of the letter *A Future of Peace*: "If some are gripped by worry about the future and find themselves at a standstill, there are also young people all over the world who are inventive and creative. These young people do not let themselves be caught up in a spiral of gloom. They know that God did not create us to be passive. (...) More than they realize, they are already making of their lives a light that shines around them."

# Poland

## Fifteen years of prayer in the Church of the Virgin Mary in Wroclaw

*For fifteen years, every first Wednesday of the month "na Piasku" ("on the sands"), on the island in the centre of Wroclaw, young people have been meeting to pray together with the songs of Taizé. This prayer is held in the 14th century Gothic church dedicated to the Virgin Mary.*

It began spontaneously, recalls one of the students at that time, Father Jacek Froniewski. We wanted to continue what we had experienced during the European meeting held in our city the winter of 1989-1990. That meeting was an important event for us and for the entire town, and the inhabitants of Wroclaw still remember it today. A month after the end of the meeting, we decided, encouraged by the Taizé brothers and Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz, to invite everybody to a time of prayer in one of the churches where we prayed during the European meeting. We chose this church of the Virgin Mary *"na Piasku,"* where we still meet today. During the first year, the parishes of Wroclaw took turns preparing the prayer each month. Then, the preparation was entrusted to the students in one of the university parishes.

The preparation begins around 5pm. The musicians come ahead of time; some form a small choir. Then there is a rehearsal for all who want to learn the songs. Another team sets out candles and icons in the chapel and distributes songbooks. The prayer begins at 7:15pm and usually there are more than 100 people—university and high school students, seminarians from the nearby seminary, priests who are a faithful support. The prayer *"na Piasku"*, "the prayer on the sands," as we say, is not just to relive what happened years ago, but it is above all an encounter with the living God through singing and silence. It is a time full of joy and hope in the centre of a large city. It is a simple sign of unity and faithfulness, without too many unnecessary words. Every month, we can pray with trust and sing *"Śpiewaj Panu cała Ziemio*!" "Sing to the Lord, all the earth!"

*In other cities of Europe, young people meet to pray with the songs of Taizé. In Barcelona, for example, young people began a prayer 25 years ago that still today is going on each week. For information on some prayers with the songs of Taizé, see:*

www.taize.fr/en_article683.html (UK)
www.taize.fr/en_article1055.html (USA)
www.taize.fr/en_article913.html (Canada)

# Brazil

## *"Jornada da confiança"* in Goias

Once or twice a year, the Taizé brothers living in Brazil prepare a youth meeting in one of the major cities of the country. These *"Jornadas da Confiança"* are stages in the pilgrimage of trust on earth. Each meeting brings hope to those who take part. The most recent meeting was held from October 9-12, 2004 in Goias, a historic city situated to the west of Brasilia. Just over a thousand young adults took part. The bishop was delighted to see so many young people, for the local church has difficulty in reaching the young.

During the three months of intensive preparation, the preparation team lived in the house of the bishop, on the outskirts of Goias. By his simple and fraternal presence, the bishop greatly contributed to the harmony in the team. Living and working together during several months to prepare a *Jornada* is always a major challenge for the dozen young adults, most of whom do not know one another before.

In this diocese, few young people participate actively in the life of the Church. Several parishes have no youth group. In contrast to other *Jornadas*, it proved difficult to organise a local team to take responsibility for the meeting. Consequently, the team who had come from elsewhere had a heavy responsibility to shoulder. On the other hand, there was the precious collaboration of a young Dominican, made available for the *Jornada* by his order; there was much support too from the local Benedictine monastery, which has long been linked by friendship with the Taizé brothers living in Brazil. Thirty eight years ago, in Olinda, in North East Brazil, the present prior of the monastery was part of a small community made up of Benedictine monks and Taizé brothers.

The gymnasium was decorated with regional motives; from the typical scraggy vegetation to details of the historic city of Goias. The city sprang up in the 18th century, because of gold mining.

During the first prayer, some of the young people were unable to keep silent, but as the days went on, the climate of the prayer intensified. Monday evening, for the prayer around the Cross, and during the final celebration on Tuesday morning, the general fervour was quite perceptible. For the final celebration, one of the women had prepared 500 pancakes. These were blessed and shared out in groups of fifty, as in the "feeding the five thousand". Also during the final prayer the proclamation of the Creed was dialogued, like the questions and answers at a baptism.

In the region of Goias, there is a whole series of encampments of landless farmers. One of the brothers spent the month before the meeting visiting these encampments, staying in one of them for a week. During the meeting, with the brother, the people welcomed 25 young people. For these young people from the city, this was a very big experience. On the final day of the meeting, they spoke to everyone about their experience, and especially about the welcome they had received.

See: www.taize.fr/en_article912.html

# Brother Roger: Prayer for Asia

In an interview, Brother Roger said, "The calamity that has occurred in several Asian countries has touched our hearts very deeply. These countries are so dear to us. In our Taizé Community, we have brothers from India and from Indonesia. Some of our brothers have shared in the life of the very poor in Asia for more than thirty years. It is good to remind ourselves these days that God does not will either calamities or wars. He never provokes fear or anxiety. God can only love and he shares the sorrow of those passing through incomprehensible trials. He enables us to lighten the burdens of others. We ask God to console the peoples of Asia in their immense distress. In communion with them, we say:

God, you love us: pour out your compassion on all those in Asia who are experiencing deep distress. When we are disconcerted by human suffering, enable us, through our lives, to be humble witnesses to peace."

# Letter from Taizé

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